



Odessa Shannon

First African American woman to have been elected to a policy-making political position in Montgomery County. First woman to hold the post of Special Assistant to the Montgomery County Executive

Odessa M. Shannon was born in Washington, D.C. She was educated in the public schools of Washington, graduating as Valedictorian of her high school class. She received her B.A from Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, graduating on the Dean's List. Shannon began her public career as a teacher in the Baltimore public schools. Later, she entered the federal government in the computer field. Then, she rose from the ranks to attain one of the highest non-political positions in the Senior Executive Service as National Program Director for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. As National Program Director, she was responsible for the operation of 49 field offices nationwide, and the work sharing agreements with all of the state and local Human Rights agencies.

After retiring from the federal government, Shannon was selected as Special Assistant to the County Executive of Montgomery County, Maryland, Charles Gilchrist. Shannon was the first woman to hold this position. Later, she was Deputy Director of the Department of Family Resources. Since 1995, she has been the Executive Director of the Montgomery County Human Rights Commission (previously the Human Relations Commission).

The Office of Human Rights was established by law to help avoid and conciliate intergroup friction and to enforce human right laws. Rights protected under the law cover employment, public accommodations, housing, and commercial real estate. The law also makes discrimination illegal when it is based on items including but not limited to race, color, religion, ancestry, sex or age. The Office enforces the county's human rights laws in employment, public accommodation, and housing. The Office of Human Rights also investigates incidents of hate/violence and complaints of discrimination, and sponsors training to ensure fair housing opportunities and multicultural and interracial awareness.

Shannon has been involved in many civic and community activities and served on the Board of Director's of several organizations. These include Montgomery Housing Partnership, Harriet's List, United Way, the Montgomery County Arts Council, the Regional Institute of Children and Adolescents, and Positive Shades of Blacks. She is also one of the original directors of National Political Congress of Black Women. She is a graduate of Leadership Montgomery 1997. She is also member of the Coalition Opposed to Violence & Extremism. Shannon was elected to the Montgomery County Board of Education in 1982. Her campaign marked the first election of an African American woman to a policy-making political position in Montgomery County. As of the 2002 election cycle, she remains the only African American woman to have achieved that goal in the county.

She is the founder of the Human Rights Hall of Fame, Montgomery County, and is listed in several Who's Who, including Who's Who in Black America, the World's Who's Who of Women and the Hall of Fame of the International Who's Who of Business and Professional Women in 1999. She has been the recipient of

numerous awards, including the NAACP (Washington Committee) Legal Defense and Educational Award for Exceptional Achievement in Advancing the Rights of Minorities and Women; Outstanding Public Service Award from the American Society for Public Administration, National Capital Area; the Hornbook Award for Outstanding Service to Education, and most recently, the Women of Vision Award from the Montgomery County Commission for Women.

She is the proud mother of two young adults, and enjoys her hobbies of travel, bridge and books.

SOURCES:

- Montgomery County Office of Human Rights